



Reporting and Legal Issues: Sexual Harassment

There are several ways to respond to sexual harassment.

Informal complaint

An informal complaint is not made in writing. Instead, the complaint is resolved informally, with or without the help of others. Resolution can take place in a number of ways.

Direct approach

You confront the harasser, explain that you don't appreciate the behavior, and demand that it stop. If you take the direct approach with your harasser, it may help to:

- **Prepare.** Write out your thoughts before approaching the person. Think carefully about what to say and how to say it.
- **Communicate clearly.** Avoid interpreting motives. Instead, focus on behaviors that must change. This will help you determine whether the person respected your request or not. Clear communication also gives the person something specific to do and may help that person comply with your request.
- **Stay calm and courteous.** Don't give them anything to use against you. If tempers flare, walk away.
- **Focus.** Stick to the reason for the conversation: the harassing behavior and its impact. Don't get distracted by other topics.

Indirect approach

Send a letter to the harasser that outlines the situation, your feelings about the harasser's behavior, and your suggested resolution. The indirect approach can be useful if you feel unsafe or uncomfortable having a conversation with your harasser.

Third party

Take along another person when you confront your harasser. This other person might intervene on your behalf to resolve the conflict. Or the third party might simply come along to provide protection or support as you confront the harasser yourself.

Chain of command

Reporting the situation and behavior to the chain of command can also help resolve the situation. Reporting to command doesn't mean you have to file a formal complaint.

In any of these approaches, you should document all contact with your harasser, as well as their reactions. This can be useful information if the situation escalates, or you decide to file a formal complaint later.

Sexual Harassment Reporting

- Informal complaint
- Direct approach
- Indirect approach
- Third Party
- Chain of Command
- Formal complaint



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Formal complaint

This written complaint triggers an official investigation. You can file a formal complaint with your chain of command. If that makes you uncomfortable or creates a conflict of interest, you can file your complaint with another chain of command, an inspector general, chaplain, provost marshal, or medical personnel. Be aware that confidential reporting can only be guaranteed with chaplains and lawyers.

Formal complaints require specific documentation and must be filed within 60 days of the incident.

Outcomes of sexual harassment investigations can vary. Guilt is determined by a “preponderance of evidence” that supports the claim of harassment. If found guilty, offenders will, at minimum, receive counseling from their commander. Punishment may also include discharge or other administrative or judicial action.

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